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November 1, 2022

RE: Thomas Monroe DeVelin

To: The Honorable Sarah Morrison

My name is Michelle Yamaguchi, and I am Thomas Monroe DeVelin's aunt; I have known Thomas since his birth. His mother is my only sibling. There are only three children between his mother and I, and there remains only one set of Thomas' grandparents – our parents - surviving today.

I understand that Thomas, whom we call Tom, has pled guilty to federal gun charges and I am writing to offer my knowledge of who Thomas is, that he is a person far better than the offense he has pled guilty to.

Thomas was a premature birth and struggled to thrive as an infant. I recall he was very thin and delicate in his first year which greatly concerned everyone in the family, and of course his parents most of all. He eventually became a robust toddler and a happy, inquisitive child. Once he started school, he was an average student, working harder in the subjects he liked best. He participated in various activities, including the Waverly High School tennis and soccer teams and the Waverly band, where he enjoyed playing trumpet. He really liked being part of a team and working with others.

Tom joined the Boy Scouts of America as a Cub Scout and participated in scout activities throughout his school years, culminating in an Eagle Scout award. He undertook many service projects with his troop as well as individual efforts, including his Eagle Service Project through which he coordinated repainting all the fire hydrants in Chillicothe. Earning his Eagle Scout award provided him with life lessons in communication, project planning, leadership and teamwork, civic responsibility, environmental sustainability, and personal integrity as well as practical skills such as cooking and safety. To me, one of the most remarkable things about the Eagle Scout is the fact that the Scout learns and applies leadership skills as a child, which indicates the individual can continue to apply these skills throughout life.

Throughout his youth, Tom exemplified all that it means to be a Boy Scout. He has always offered a hand to his friends and neighbors, performing the typical tasks such as shoveling out sidewalks in the winter and volunteering at community events.

When my husband and I undertook a guardianship of an eight-year-old child from the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Tom, who was a teenager at the time and could have easily ignored him in favor of his friends or other activities, included him in activities during family gatherings, teaching a shy child how to safely play on a zip line, how to tie a fish hook, along with camping skills. We later adopted this child and we all appreciated Tom's efforts to ensure he felt part of the family from day one.

From junior high, he has had a love of cats and other animals. He adopted several cats over the years and brought them into the family home, doting on each one.

I recall Tom loved playing with his toy soldiers as a child and no one in our family was surprised when he made the decision to join the military. Thomas took the initiative to research the various options available to him and chose the National Guard as it afforded him the opportunity to join as a high school junior. To prepare himself for the vigor of basic training, he undertook physical training such as hiking with a weighted backpack; on several occasions he slept outside in a snow drift inside a sleeping bag to prove to himself he could handle adverse conditions. After his graduation from high school in 2016 he was able to increase his military service time and was steadily promoted inside the Ohio National Guard through the past eight years which included a deployment to Afghanistan in 2017. We communicated while he was in Afghanistan, and I recall asking him if he was ever fearful during his deployment. He answered by telling me about it being difficult to sleep due to the constant bombardment of bombs aimed at the base and anti-missile defense alarms, and the high security levels they were required to live under on and off base. At this point he was only a year out of high school, and I believe he suffered quite a bit of anxiety and stress during this deployment.

Through my conversations with Tom over the past few years, I was aware he genuinely loved his military service. He had informed me last year that he was looking forward to another overseas deployment, but the Ohio National Guard revised their plans after the U.S. recalled troops in 2021. In recent months during his incarceration, he has mentioned that one of his deepest disappointments in himself is that he has forever lost his opportunity to continue serving in the military; he has immersed himself in the culture of the Army and National Guard and grieves the loss of his career in the Guard.

My husband and I have written to Tom, and I talked over the telephone with him since his arrest. Once Tom has completed all requirements of the court, we have offered him the opportunity to live with us here in our Hawaii home so that he can begin anew. We have our own company, where his work ethic, organizational skills, and desire to help others would be of benefit. As Hawaii is so ethnically and culturally diverse, we believe living here will allow him to appreciate those differences by being able to participate in a wide variety of activities and to meet new friends. Other than my husband, son, and myself, he has no other acquaintances here in the islands so he would be able to make a fresh start and build a new career. He will need new hobbies and there are many outdoor sports here that he can try to find the best fit for himself, and to develop new relationships. Through our conversations, Tom has indicated he is grateful that he will have the opportunity to rebuild his life. My husband and I will be able to counsel him and offer support to ensure he will accomplish this undertaking. It brings us back to what makes an Eagle Scout successful: being able to accomplish whatever they set their mind toward, and that asking for help or guidance is not a weakness, and that leading or following each has its place. Tom has already seen that some prisoners do not have a support structure and we know that he will not squander our offer. Due to the cost of living in Hawaii, it may not be his forever home, but a safe place to refocus.

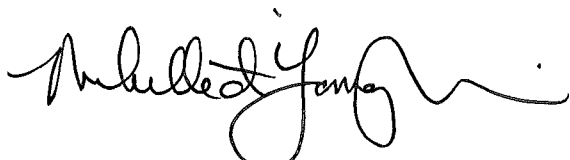
To my knowledge, Tom has never been in any trouble before with law enforcement, not even a traffic ticket. I understand that he fully cooperated with law enforcement during his arrest, and he has shown he is taking responsibility for his actions, not only through his plea, but by attending counseling this summer along with a veteran's rehabilitation program at the Butler County Jail. He plans to seek additional counseling when it is available. I am surprised at none of this because he has always respected law enforcement officials and accepted responsibility when he was wrong. He has always been willing to take action to correct his mistakes, whether through a simple apology to a friend, or making something right. Tom has expressed his remorse to me several times regarding his actions and their effect on his family, and I know him to be sincere. He is extremely close to his older sister and is sorry that he has caused her and his parents such anxiety these past months. My parents, now in their

80s and frail, are distressed knowing they may never see Tom again; I know he is also distraught over this possibility. He has expressed his belief to me that he has dishonored his family, and he wants to make amends. We have no doubt that Tom will be able to engage the values he has learned and practiced over the years of perseverance, discipline, and accountability. He is already considering how he can volunteer in the future to help other youth avoid his own errors.

Tom and I have also corresponded at length about the differences between real friends, of which you only need one or two, the ones that wish you only good tidings and are there to cheer your successes and wipe your tears when they are needed; we discussed the distinction of those who know your inner thoughts and dreams, versus "friends" who are only really passing acquaintances. He is extremely young to learn this painful lesson, but he is now more thankful than ever for his close friends. My husband and I believe his recent actions were totally out of character and the suicide last year of one of his friends led him to make some poor decisions as he struggled to cope with the trauma he felt witnessing the event and being unable to prevent it. Tom plans to pursue additional counseling, when possible, as he continues to grieve for his friend.

Your Honor, thank you very much for your time and providing me the opportunity to present to you what I know to be the true side of Thomas Monroe DeVelin. I hope that you will find Thomas's life and work, and his honesty, of value. I am available by phone or email to confirm any details in this letter that you may wish.

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle A. Yamaguchi". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michelle A. Yamaguchi